

Afghanistan

ON-THE-RECORD BRIEFING  
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CONCERNING REGIONAL ISSUES  
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Q Can I -- could I just -- does this administration draw any lessons from the Afghanistan success and apply them to Southern Africa? In other words, would this administration be willing to escalate its military support for the rebels in order to give the Cubans and the Soviets an incentive to disengage?

SEC. ARMACOST: I think there are certain elements that are in common, but each of these conflicts is sui generis. We have ourselves resisted the effort to try and inscribe general principles into some understanding with the Russians. You'll remember that back in the early seventies there was an effort to describe general principles of our relationship which would (should?) apply to Third World situations in general. And they were variously described as "rules of the road" or "principles of restraint." We had a rather bitter experience with that and felt it generated certain misunderstandings. So our modus operandi has been to proceed with the details of specific situations, I suppose consistent with our common law tradition, in the hope that as you deal with a number of cases, maybe some principles emerge.

There are several aspects of the Afghan settlement that have some relevance, above all the withdrawal of outside forces. That has been a consistent objective. The lever in the Angolan situation, quite apart from the fact that UNITA has roots in the society and has proved to be a fairly potent political and military force of its own, has been the fact that South African forces are themselves on Angolan territory. So the incentive for the Angolans to settle has been clearly their own desire to secure a withdrawal of Angolan (?) forces from Angola and to obtain the buffer that would exist for them if South African forces were pushed back across the Orange River.

The second principle is this idea of national reconciliation, is the encouragement by outsiders that the parties inside a country beset by civil conflict find some formula in which a broader-based government can be organized. It must be remembered in each one of these cases that we and the Soviets can't produce a solution, but we can, because of influence we have with some of the parties, encourage a settlement. But the parties most directly concerned, in the end, have got to work out the formula. In this sense, Afghanistan was quite different, because Russian forces were themselves directly involved, and the principal issue for us was getting them out, promptly and completely.

Q Can you tell us, please, whether you've noticed any

change in Soviet supplies to Afghanistan, whether there's been any change in American supplies to the Mujaheddin, and what the American position would be if, as one assumes he might, the General Secretary said to the President that you could help things out a great deal by discouraging the Mujaheddin from harrassing our withdrawal?

SEC. ARMACOST: Yeah. I have not discerned any change. The withdrawal commenced only about a week ago. There have been indications, that we have picked up -- that the intention of the Soviets to turn over equipment and facilities will be on a fairly large scale -- we've heard estimates ranging from half a billion to a billion dollars worth of equipment and/or installations and facilities. That doesn't strike me as a demonstration of tremendous restraint. For our part, I would recall, simply, what we said at the time we signed the Geneva Agreement, that we retain the right to support our friends. We will exercise the right, in the event the Soviets continue to supply equipment to Kabul. And we'll have practical ways of accomplishing that purpose. But I don't intend to comment beyond that.

I don't know what General Secretary Gorbachev is likely to say. I gather there has been some harrassment of Soviet forces as they leave. The position we've taken on that has been generally that a prompt timetable would be one which is more likely to elicit cooperation from the Mujahidin, but that direct discussions between them and the Mujahidin were the most efficient means of getting some kind of local arrangements assured, which would protect their forces in the process of withdrawal.

Q Has there been any of that -- to your knowledge?

SEC. ARMACOST: I wouldn't confirm any. We hear rumors, but they are not the kind of rumors that we could, ourselves, independently corroborate.

Q Can I ask also, back on the Angola thing, for just a second? You called for a realistic and prompt withdrawal. While I don't know what your timetable is, I think I can understand what "prompt" might mean, but I'm not sure I know what "realistic" means.

SEC. ARMACOST: In this case, I think it means, from our standpoint, "prompt." (Laughter.)

Q Oh.